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SUMMARY RECORD OF THE 53rd MEETING

Chairman: Mr. CISSÉ (Senegal)

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The meeting was called to order at 10.40 a.m.

AGENDA ITEM 97: ADVANCEMENT OF WOMEN (continued) (A/49/38, A/49/176, A/49/204-E/1994/90, A/49/205-E/1994/91, A/49/217-E/1994/103, A/49/287-S/1994/894 and Corr.1, A/49/308, A/49/314 and Corr.1, A/49/327 and Corr.1, A/49/349, A/49/354, A/49/365-E/1994/119, A/49/378, A/49/381, A/49/462 and Corr.1, A/49/506, A/49/532 and A/49/587 and Corr.1; A/C.3/49/13 and A/C.3/49/26)

1. Ms. DEWAR (South Africa) thanked the Secretary-General of the Fourth World Conference on Women for having sent a special message of solidarity to the women of South Africa following the April 1994 elections. Women had played a major role in the period leading up to the country's first democratic elections, in particular through the Transitional Executive Council. Their formal incorporation into the political process was a first step towards integrating women into the political, social, economic and cultural life of the nation. However, the most difficult and hazardous part of the transition to a democratic, non-racial society lay ahead, and South Africa looked forward to the continued support of the United Nations and the international community as it worked to ensure that no one was denied his or her social or human rights on the grounds of gender, race, religion or ethnicity.

2. The new Government's position on the empowerment of women arose from a longstanding commitment to the principle of non-discrimination. In the post-election period of new beginnings, her country found itself in the privileged position of being able to initiate change for all South African women. Its reconstruction and development programme took into account the need for affirmative action to achieve and accelerate women's political, social, cultural and economic empowerment. It was determined to become a fully fledged member of the family of nations, one that made human rights and gender-sensitive issues central to its foreign and domestic policy.

3. Her country had welcomed the opportunity to participate in the Fifth African Regional Conference on Women, and it was participating actively in preparations for the Fourth World Conference on Women. On the basis of broad consultations, its national preparatory committee for the Conference had drawn up a document on the status of women in South Africa, and she thanked the Secretary-General of the Conference for providing useful guidance to that committee during her recent visit to the country. South Africa fully supported all United Nations initiatives and instruments aimed at eradicating discrimination and abuse towards women.

4. Ms. ARAD (Israel) said that the economic contribution of women was one of the most important subjects to be addressed at the Fourth World Conference on Women in Beijing. Indeed, it was of such importance that she urged the Committee to recommend that the General Assembly encourage the convening of women's economic conferences in the various regions, along the lines of the Mediterranean and European women's summit meeting held in Marrakesh in May 1994. The declaration adopted by the meeting committed participants to promoting educational programmes for peace which highlighted the values of tolerance,

sisterhood, humanity and solidarity with justice, as well as to combating discrimination, intolerance, extremism and violence that endangered women or undermined their rights and their potential for achievement. It also emphasized the need to facilitate contacts among women working in legislative bodies, the media, business and non-governmental organizations.

5. At the International Conference on Population and Development, many people who formerly had paid only lip service to the empowerment of women had realized that, unless they promoted education, vocational training and employment for women, they risked the total failure of national and international population and development plans. It was necessary to seize the opportunity created by that realization to reverse the situation of poverty, unemployment and social security and wage discrimination faced by the majority of women.

6. In preparing for the Beijing Conference, special attention should be paid to the critical role of non-governmental organizations in the advancement of women. That was why her country had convened a special preparatory conference of representatives of Jewish non-governmental organizations from 26 countries. The declaration adopted by the conference recognized the pioneering efforts of women in creating a positive atmosphere for peace in the Middle East and urged the inclusion of women at all levels of peace negotiations. It condemned all forms of violence against women and demanded that Governments implement and fund policies to combat them. It recommended that men and women work together to eliminate all forms of discrimination and to ensure the equal participation of women in decision-making at all levels, called upon Governments to combat the feminization of poverty and facilitate women's access to the job market on equal terms, and demanded that affirmative action policies for women be implemented in the public and private sectors. It stressed the importance of the family as the basic unit of society, called for the elimination of all forms of inequity both within the family and before the courts, and stated that the family was entitled to comprehensive protection and support. It also urged States to take all appropriate measures to ensure women's universal access to health care services, including those related to family planning and sexual health. It recognized that education and training were crucial to achieving gender equality and economic independence for women, and suggested that young women should constitute at least 20 per cent of the membership of delegations to the Beijing Conference. Lastly, it recognized the influence exerted by non-governmental organizations on legislation for women and urged their participation in the monitoring and implementation of the Platform for Action of the Conference.

7. Peace remained the central issue for the United Nations. For women, peace meant life - that of their children and their children's children - and a chance for equality and development.

8. Ms. AL-HAMAMI (Yemen) said that socio-economic development should remain on the international agenda with a view to solving socio-economic problems, particularly in the developing countries, otherwise it would be impossible to eliminate social ills and achieve greater respect for human rights. In that connection, the international community should take advantage of the impetus provided by the new international order to achieve the advancement of women.

The timing of the Fourth World Conference on Women was thus auspicious. Yemen was involved in preparations for the Conference through its various official and non-governmental bodies concerned with women's issues. The Conference should devote particular attention to the rights of rural women, whose dual role as providers and caregivers increased their vulnerability. Her Government was concerned to integrate women more fully into the development process, to which rural women made a positive contribution largely owing to the migration of large numbers of men.

9. Under the Yemeni Constitution, women enjoyed equal rights and obligations with men. Despite efforts and legal measures aimed at improving their social position and productivity, however, tradition ensured that they remained uninfluential in politics and played only a marginal role in the economy. Efforts had also been made to improve women's health, education and employment. Again for reasons of tradition, however, high illiteracy and low school attendance persisted among women, as did their low rate of participation in the labour force. Poverty, illiteracy and underdevelopment were major obstacles to the advancement of women in many countries, including Yemen. The international community should increase its support for educational, cultural, health and population programmes in the developing countries, which would have positive repercussions for women.

10. Her delegation shared the view that education was the sole weapon against underdevelopment. It was also of the utmost importance for the advancement of women. Eliminating discrimination against women also meant ensuring that they enjoyed equal employment opportunities. In that connection, efforts to improve the status of women in the Secretariat should continue.

11. She was optimistic that the Fourth World Conference on Women would attach equal importance to all women's issues and would address the problems of poverty and illiteracy, which were severe impediments to women's enjoyment of their fundamental rights. Lastly, although each country had its own priorities, she believed that there was unanimous agreement on the importance of eliminating all forms of violence against women. She therefore appealed for concerted national and international efforts to protect women from persecution, torture and violence.

12. Ms. VALLE CAMINO (Cuba) reiterated her country's support for the Fourth World Conference on Women, whose three basic objectives - equality, development and peace - were of particular importance for developing countries. The Conference would provide an opportunity for Member States to reaffirm their determination to make the advancement of women an international priority. Using the Nairobi Forward-looking Strategies for the Advancement of Women as a frame of reference, the Conference should analyse both successes and failures in transforming the role of women. The documents produced by the regional preparatory conferences would contribute significantly to the Conference's success, as would the national reports, the efforts of national committees and the outstanding contributions of non-governmental organizations.

13. That the international community was beginning to recognize the importance of women was demonstrated by the attention given to women's issues at the World Conference on Human Rights and the International Conference on Population and Development. The role of women would also be central to the debate at the forthcoming World Summit for Social Development, because employment, poverty and social disintegration were problems that affected women and could not be solved without addressing their needs.

14. Her country attached particular importance to the work being done by the Commission on the Status of Women in preparation for the World Conference, and it encouraged all delegations to participate actively in the Commission's next session, which would be decisive for the elaboration of the draft Platform for Action. Of the issues raised in the draft Platform, the eradication of poverty, equal participation for women in decision-making, efforts to combat violence against women and the promotion and protection of women's human rights were of particular interest to developing countries.

15. Her country urged all States that had not yet done so to ratify or accede to the Convention on the Elimination of All Forms of Discrimination against Women. It stressed that violence against women was a serious human rights violation and impeded the integration of women into the development process. Such violence included not only domestic violence but also racism and racial discrimination and unilateral coercive policies that denied women's rights to life, procreation, development and fulfilment. Cuba therefore welcomed the appointment of a Special Rapporteur on violence against women charged with formulating specific recommendations in that area.

16. She lamented the lack of transparency in the action taken thus far on the proposed merger of the United Nations International Research and Training Institute for the Advancement of Women (INSTRAW) and the United Nations Development Fund for Women (UNIFEM). It should be remembered that it was the Member States that entrusted mandates to the various United Nations bodies.

17. Ms. WONG (Australia) said that, in setting the priority objectives of the full and equal participation of women in society, the eradication of all forms of discrimination on grounds of sex, and the empowerment of women, the International Conference on Population and Development had laid a foundation for the Fourth World Conference on Women. The conclusions of the World Conference on Human Rights and the appointment of a Special Rapporteur on violence against women had also been welcome developments. She hoped to see closer cooperation between the Commission on the Status of Women, the Committee on the Elimination of Discrimination against Women and other human rights bodies. However, her delegation was concerned at the constraints on the ability of the Committee on the Elimination of Discrimination against Women (CEDAW) to carry out its mandate. Its workload was likely to become even greater as a result of the Vienna and Beijing conferences. If it was to be taken seriously as a human rights treaty body, CEDAW must have adequate meeting time and resources.

18. Her country had participated actively in the Jakarta regional preparatory meeting for the World Conference and had been the main regional donor to the

Pacific island countries' preparation of their platform for action for the Conference. While the Asia-Pacific plan of action shared a number of areas of concern with other regions, the empowerment of indigenous women had been identified as a particular strategic objective for her region. The plan provided a framework within which national priorities were to be set by each country, and her Government had already begun that process. While recognizing the importance of a concise Platform for Action for the World Conference, she hoped that its key objectives would reflect the best examples identified at the regional and national levels and by the expert groups, since it was to cover a period extending well beyond the year 2000 in the implementation of the Nairobi Strategies.

19. The Commission on the Status of Women had called upon United Nations bodies and specialized agencies, as well as other intergovernmental organizations, to make resources available to meet the global priorities identified in the Platform for Action. She hoped that Member States would be able to use the agreed framework for advancing the status of women, to be set out in the Platform for Action, to help them identify specific targets, reflecting the requirements of women in their own countries, to be attained by the year 2000. She encouraged Governments to specify such targets at the Conference.

20. Ms. MEGURO (Japan) said that the rewards received by women were not commensurate with their increasingly significant contributions to social and economic life. Moreover, while gender inequality had become less visible in many sectors of society, other women's issues had become important challenges world wide. The Fourth World Conference on Women would represent the culmination of international efforts to create a blueprint for achieving an equal partnership between women and men.

21. Despite the progress made in ensuring de jure equality for women in Japan, gender stereotypes and prejudice against women persisted. It was essential that the international community continue its efforts to resolve such problems, and that it create an environment in which men and women shared equal responsibility in all areas of activity. Japan had taken steps to strengthen its own national mechanisms aimed at promoting gender equality.

22. Stressing the importance of women's human rights, she urged countries which had not yet done so to ratify the Convention on the Elimination of All Forms of Discrimination against Women and to use it as a legal framework at the national level. Women's human rights should also be incorporated into the mainstream of United Nations system-wide activities; coordination and cooperation among United Nations bodies were crucial to that end.

23. Recognizing that the advancement of women had important implications for social stability, Japan would continue to promote policies and projects related to women in development. It appreciated the valuable efforts of the United Nations Development Fund for Women (UNIFEM) to bring about the empowerment of women, particularly in developing countries, and its role in the preparations for the Beijing Conference. It also acknowledged the significant role played by the International Research and Training Institute for the Advancement of Women

(INSTRAW) in the research and training fields; the collection of gender statistics was essential to assessing women's conditions and planning strategies for their empowerment.

24. She noted with concern that the percentage of women in posts subject to geographical distribution in the United Nations Secretariat had improved only marginally, and urged further efforts to recruit more qualified women to meet the targets set by the Secretary-General. Japan's own efforts in that regard had led to an increase in the proportion of Japanese women to Japanese men in such posts.

25. Non-governmental organizations in Japan had been strong advocates for women's rights and had provided a women's perspective for policy formulation. She hoped that such organizations and her Government would work even more closely to fulfil the strategic goals identified in the course of preparations for the Beijing Conference.

26. Ms. DE WET (Namibia) expressed appreciation to UNIFEM for the various projects for the advancement of women that it had carried out in Namibia, and noted that the Fourth World Conference on Women would be the first international women's conference that Namibia attended as an independent State. Women's active involvement in the preparations for the Conference could be attributed to her Government's gender-balanced policy of national reconciliation and affirmative action. Namibia's national preparatory committee comprised women and men drawn from a broad cross-section of society. A national coordinator acted as liaison between the committee chairperson and the five subcommittees responsible for the dual implementation of the preparatory committee's decisions. A magazine, Taatu, had been launched with financial assistance from the Ford Foundation. The title, meaning "they pound", referred to women's role as providers, unpaid workers and caregivers and also symbolized their pounding at the barriers which constrained them. The magazine aimed to inform and mobilize Namibians in preparation for Beijing and beyond.

27. Meetings being held throughout Namibia were enabling women in even the remotest rural areas to participate in preparations for the Conference. Rural women faced specific problems and represented a majority of women world wide. She welcomed as a milestone in the advancement of African women the platform for action adopted at the Fifth African Regional Conference on Women, which would enhance the Platform for Action of the World Conference. During the consultations leading up to the thirty-ninth session of the Commission on the Status of Women, Namibia would seek to ensure that the concerns of women trapped in poverty, illiteracy and ill health were clearly reflected. Her delegation was also concerned at the situation of girl children, which should be addressed urgently.

28. Ms. PIERCE (United Nations Population Fund (UNFPA)) said that the International Conference on Population and Development had underscored the central role of women. Their empowerment was an important end in itself; indeed, the Cairo Programme of Action had devoted one full chapter to that issue. Similarly, sustainable development was possible only if women

participated fully and equally in all aspects of development. Family and household responsibilities must be shared equally between women and men.

29. One of the main activities of UNFPA was to ensure that the relevant sections of the Cairo Programme of Action were integrated into the Platform for Action of the Fourth World Conference on Women, particularly with regard to quantitative goals such as the reduction of maternal and child mortality, and universal access to education and to quality reproductive health care and family planning services. The Fund supported population education programmes which highlighted the need for gender sensitivity and the elimination of gender stereotypes, within a general framework of respect for countries' own traditions and objectives.

30. With regard to awareness-creation activities, the Fund's 1995 report on world population would focus on the empowerment of women, and the Fund would continue to support the United Nations Statistical Division in its research on women.

31. The Fund had been active at the country level in preparations for the Beijing Conference, providing funding for meetings and publicity initiatives. All UNFPA field offices had been directed to work closely with national preparatory committees, women's groups and non-governmental organizations. The Fund had also been represented at all regional preparatory meetings, and had helped enable non-governmental organizations, particularly those relevant to women, to participate in the preparatory process.

AGENDA ITEM 100: HUMAN RIGHTS QUESTIONS (continued)

(a) IMPLEMENTATION OF HUMAN RIGHTS INSTRUMENTS (continued) (A/C.3/49/L.28*)

Draft resolution A/C.3/49/L.28*

32. Ms. MORGAN SOTOMAYOR (Mexico), introducing the draft resolution, said that Guatemala had become a sponsor.

The meeting rose at 12.20 p.m.